

B. J. Palmer and the 'German Issue': The Crisis in Postwar European Chiropractic

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In 1954, the influx of German physicians from the East caused a crisis in the direction of the profession. A medical "Study Group on Chiropractic" issued an invitation to B.J. Palmer, the self-proclaimed Developer, to deliver a series of lectures in Germany. Before B.J. arrived at his decision, a number of German, Belgian, Swiss and English chiropractors became involved in a bitter controversy over the proposed visit. F.W. Illi, the Swiss researcher, even called B.J. a "Quisling" for considering the lectures. The author made several postwar visits with European chiropractic leaders and groups, and reviews the controversy and its impact upon the evolution of the profession in Germany and other countries.

In 1954, less than a decade after the remnants of European chiropractic had emerged from the ashes of war and occupation (only Swiss and Swedish chiropractors survived without loss), the influx of German physicians from the East caused a crisis in the direction of the profession. A medical "Study Group on Chiropractic" issued an invitation to B. J. Palmer, the self-proclaimed Developer, to deliver a series of lectures in Germany.

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B.J. Palmer recalled in a 1955 publication titled "The German Issue," that the first invitation came from Dr. Gottfried Gutmann in Westphalia, Germany on November 29, 1954, stating: "Acting as chairman of our 'Medical Study Group of Research for Chiropractic,' I am extremely glad to let you know how much its members welcome your intention to lecture in the presence of an audience of German medicals."²

B. J. answered Dr. Gutmann under date of December 26, 1954: "Before accepting or rejecting such a visit for such a purpose may we (it should be recalled that B. J. wrote in the first person using "we" and "our") suggest some pertinent information we should like to have first. Then we enumerate twelve points, fifth of

which is as follows: 'We would want correct and complete X-ray equipment ready at the place of our meeting, to take, expose, develop and interpret such films of all who would want such so we could prove the value and need of the kind of service we would demonstrate.' The seventh point said: 'This X-ray equipment to be installed at and in the hotel for ready use.'

Dr. Gutmann answered B. J.'s letter on January 10, 1955, and responded to his 12 points: "(1) We are glad that you will present your work fully and thoroughly. (4) Your proposal to hold a symposium or a seminar about two days is very well. (5) 'A complete X-ray equipment we can only get within a hospital or a private medical center. In Germany it is impossible to install a modern X-ray equipment in a hotel, for we have to watch the forbids of the police about X-ray safety. But we possess enough hospitals with good X-ray equipment which were willing to give their apparatus and rooms for our symposium. I myself propose to hold the symposium in Hamm in the hospital. It has the second largest X-ray station in Germany and a small audience room.'

B. J. received a letter from the English chiropractor, Arthur Scofield, dated January 19, 1955: "I feel together with Dr. Arthur Cleave and Dr. Henri Gillet of Brussels, that a great deal could be done to further chiropractic science in Europe. Could you see your way clear to accept an invitation to address the medics of Germany? For knowing your powers of conversation, with your vast knowledge and ability to hold your audience tense and receptive, you can sway them to what you know, and want them to believe as the clear interpretation of what Simon Pure chiropractic really is."³

B. J. answered Dr. Cleave on February 13, 1955: "We have gone through battles — endless of those — who would destroy these rights. We have fought and won almost all tirades, sarcasms, scorns, condemnation.

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Over, above, and beyond all this, was our ultimate objective, from which we have never varied or wavered one thought for one minute, nor do we propose to start now. We have not said we would come nor have we said we would not. We shall base our action and conclusions entirely on evidence and facts as we secure them and receive the same."

The Developer again wrote Dr. Cleave on February 21, 1955: "May we earnestly suggest the following: Your ECU *Bulletin* was premature. If you announce we are going to Germany, before we make our final decision, and we finally decide not to go, then this would place the ECU in an embarrassing position. If we decide to go to Germany, we will make the announcement from here direct, after all the evidence is in. Meanwhile, we think it the better judgment to hold in abeyance any further pronouncements until the issue is finally settled one way or the other."⁴

Possibly the bitterest aspect of the controversy emerged in a letter from the Swiss chiropractor, Fred W. H. Illi: "Dearest Dr. Palmer: I have read in the latest *Bulletin* of the European Chiropractic Association that you intended to go to Germany with a staff and give courses. I am not surprised, because when I refused to go to Germany, the German M.D.s told me that they would ask you. I myself refused to be a Quisling."

"It would seem that you are of the opinion that the German M.D.s will learn something from you. Believe me, the German M.D.s do not need you to instruct them how to treat the first cervical. They are doing it quite well now. What they do want is to see if you know something that they do not, so that they might be able to lay claim that they practice chiropractic as well as, for example, the principal of an American Chiropractic College.

"Have no delusions, these people do not speak of Innate Intelligence. They think with it. They have nerve reflexes working which can be explained very easily without mysticism. I can very well understand that your inferiority complex incites you to go to Germany playing the 'Great Man.' Dr. Joseph Janse, Dr. Clarence Weiant, and I have been solicited to play the same role, but Innate Intelligence told us that we would be fools to do so. We would be laughed at and ridiculed.

"Thus, stupidly, you would sell chiropractic to M.D.s only to be the 'Great Man.' Do you see that your betrayal would be the beginning of the end of chiropractic in the States? Do you understand that from the day in which chiropractic is taught at a German University any M.D., even an American, would be able to obtain an academic degree?

"Your illustrious father was the first man to introduce Chiropractic into the world, against all and everything; and you are the first man to be selling it for dirty money, so you are also the first in something.

"You are convinced that you have done very much for chiropractic (I do not concur in your opinion) — you will do even more; you will dig its grave. You have already once before nearly succeeded in doing it, when you put forth your hole-in-one."⁵

In the European Chiropractic *Bulletin* in February, 1955, Cleave declared that "B. J. Palmer offered to go to Germany to give courses, teach and practice. The financial engagement on the part of the Germans was too great for them. They refused to install X-ray equipment in a German hotel. They did not accept readily so — —"⁶

In an address to the Foreign Students Club of the Palmer School on April 26, 1955, B. J. summarized some of the debate: "A letter from Dr. Gillet January 22, 1955, in part says: 'If you wish to take a revenge on your profession, why not teach chiropractic to the American M.D.s directly. But it would make my blood boil to have fought, gone to court, to jail, etc., for our profession and to give it away anyway.' A letter from Dr. Seofield, January 19, 1955, in part says: 'I note you mentioned Sandberg as being the man who opened the flood gates in Germany. I recollect that together with Schwing he was accused with giving the lowdown and probably selling chiropractic to the Germans by the ECU back in April 1953.' Further correspondence from Dr. Gillet, January 29, 1955, says in part: 'You seem to think that the German M.D.s are seeking chiropractic as such. Ye Gods man, have you no experience in seeing what a medical mind can turn chiropractic into when it tries to mix it with all its medical education?'"⁷

If, in the year 1954, you had been a practicing American chiropractor and suddenly became aware that there was a German Issue, how would you have reacted? Would you have urged B. J. not to accept the invitation to lecture before the German medical group, or would you have said "Go ahead. You will do no harm?"

Suppose you are invited by a group of chiropractors 3,000 miles away inviting you to pay them a visit and give them a few lectures. You take it for granted that this means more than three days. How long did the German medical group who had invited B. J. to lecture expect him to stay with them? How long could he absent himself from his own school, where he was the central figure and required every student to spend at least a full year under him to earn the D. C. degree? Obviously not long enough to turn them into chiropractors.

Actually, by restraining B. J. from accepting the invitation to lecture in Germany, the European chiropractors may have gained nothing. On the contrary, they may have missed an opportunity of incalculable value.

Had B. J. not been restrained from accepting the invitation to lecture before the German medical group, he would certainly have maneuvered his affairs in

such a manner as to enhance both his own prestige and that of the cause for which he worked. He would have told the story of the discovery of chiropractic and then rehearsed the long and violent struggle of medical forces to eradicate the new healing art. He could have cited specific cases of extraordinary healing, supplying at the same time a rational scientific explanation of the anatomical and physiological features involved in the process.

But there were two bits of information which he never would have revealed under any circumstances: (1) the procedure of spinal analysis, and (2) the techniques of spinal adjustment. Thus I believe that the accusations of the E.C.U. critics against B. J. were totally unfounded. They gained nothing thereby. On the contrary they lost a splendid opportunity.

B. J. could have made an impression on the German doctors that would have changed their whole attitude toward chiropractic. The man who confronted them was no flamboyant high-pressure salesman, but a serious, well-informed and highly competent exponent of a system of healing which offered hope to otherwise hopelessly sick people. His message bore no trace of fraud. In the future they could in good conscience refer a troublesome case of their own to a chiropractor.

In 1954 Dr. Kurt Stein, a chiropractor living and practicing in Dresden, prepared a paper entitled *Report on Germany: A Political History of the Chiropractic Profession* which he submitted to the European Chiropractic Union for publication in their *Bulletin*. On the 21st day of April of that year a press release from Brussels, Belgium gave the following account of the report:

"The birth of natural healing methods came to Germany in 1869 when Bismarck said 'anyone to whom God has given the power to help and heal, the Police shall not prohibit.'" reports Dr. Kurt Stein in the April European Chiropractic *Bulletin*. "Since then, anyone who believed he could help or heal could put his shingle out and start to practice. He had only to inform the Board of Health Commissioner of his intention."⁸

In a concise report of Chiropractic's political history in Germany, Stein reported that the Nazi government closed the offices of 10,000 natural healers, including chiropractors, leaving only 3,000 to practice. These 3,000 healers, including chiropractors, had to become members of the reform healing association and pay 10% of their income as dues. As soon as membership in the association was dropped by a member, the German Police closed the practitioner's office.

Commenting on the Hartmannbund, similar to the AMA, Dr. Stein states that, "right from the start they fought all reform healing methods and issued a prohibition to all M.D.s not to support any of the reform

healers, and to omit all connections with them, socially and professionally. Those who did not submit had to pay a fine of 1,000 marks (German currency). One M.D. had an osteopath and a masseur in his clinic, yet when he had very difficult cases, he sent them to me. This continued for 20 years. I have never disappointed him, nor have I ever seen him personally - so as not to put him in trouble with the Hartmannbund."⁹

"This may explain," Dr. Stein said, "Why all German M.D.s practicing chiropractic claim that it belongs to the medical profession — just to avoid all connections with the chiropractors. When a German M.D. seeks the services of a chiropractor for one of his patients, it is never in the same town where he is practicing."

Commenting on the education aspect of Chiropractors, Stein reported that "For any title bestowed abroad, one has to ask permission to use it in Germany. Since no university in Germany confers the title Doctor of Chiropractic, that permission is very rarely granted. Even a German M.D. who has studied chiropractic in the U.S.A. is denied permission to use his title of D.C."

B. J., in his address to the Foreign Students Club, commented on the sincerity of the German physicians: "Notwithstanding the correspondence which tries to divert our mind from believing that the German physicians are sincere and honest — and it was done many many times in the correspondence — 31 articles have been published, written under German medical doctors' signatures in medical journals in Germany, which we have had translated, and have them in this dossier. Those German M.D.s go right down the line with chiropractic. 'Vertebral adjustment' — using our language — 'hole-in-one,' 'D. D. Palmer, discoverer,' 'B. J. Palmer, developer,' 'Innate intelligence.' You have an entirely different kind of a mind over there in Germany. Oh, we're not saying all of them are like this. But this particular group of 3,000 are investigating this thing sincerely and honestly, to find out what's happened. They go on to give case citations and testimonials."¹⁰

The assertion that a "double standard" existed for ECU liaison with German medicine and The Developer was reflected in this part of B. J.'s commentary in "The German Issue:"

"Bonn is a medical center for Germany. So it appears that what is sauce for the ECU goose is applesauce for the B. J. Gander. There was no crime in what they agreed to do, but when similar educational safeguards were established by B. J., and conditions stipulated under which we might go to Germany, which conditions were acceptable in toto the medical group, the fat was in the fire, and a bulletin was issued asking for ECU members to dissuade B. J. from selling out chiropractic

to the German M.D.s.

"Why was it right for the ECU, and wrong for B. J.? Could it be that B. J., in the intervening years of scientific research development between the time that most of the CCU members left the PSC, and now, would present a better, more simple, less complex, more practical, more efficient, less mixed, more specific, and a scientific brand of chiropractic?"¹¹

The final chapter from B. J.'s standpoint was a report from his "representative, an attorney, which I dispatched to Europe to secure an unbiased, unprejudicial opinion" of the German situation. This unnamed representative, quoted in the 1955 publication wrote on May 12, 1955:

"Here are my findings with respect to the sincerity of Dr. Gutman and his group towards you. From my talks with Dr. Gutman, I was able to gain a good impression of him. I found him deeply impressed in Chiropractic. After a careful investigation, I noted Dr. Gutmann's sincerity reflected in the following view, which he expressed for himself and on the part of many of his colleagues, all medical doctors:

"Here, in the western sector of Germany, we have been greatly impressed with what Dr. B. J. Palmer had done. For one thing, in particular, he has focused attention on something that none of us learned in medical school. He has shown us the importance of the first and second vertebrae and what they mean to the health of man. His thinking is sound, and we naturally want to learn all that we can about this."¹²

For a few years after the "German Issue" with B. J. Palmer died down, there was a continuing body of literature on chiropractic in that country. The writer, with the collaboration of the late Sol Goldschmidt, published in 1958 a volume entitled *Medicine and Chiropractic*, which subsequently went through several editions. The first printings were in Germany at Gluckstadt and we dedicated those editions both to our colleague Fred W. H. Illi and to Dr. L. Zukschwerdt, the professor of surgery at Hamburg University.¹³

REFERENCES

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- ²Palmer, B. J., *The German Issue*, (Davenport, Iowa, Palmer School of Chiropractic, 1955)
- ³Bulletin of the European Chiropractic Union, January, 1955
- ⁴Palmer, *Germ. Issue*
- ⁵Ibid
- ⁶Bulletin of E. C. U.
- ⁷Palmer, *Germ. Issue*
- ⁸Stein, Kurt, *Report on Germany: A Political History of the Chiropractic Profession*, (Dresden, April, 1954)

One chapter was entitled "The Medical Investigation of Chiropractic in Germany," and I would refer the interested reader to it and the extensive bibliography for one of the most complete explorations of chiropractic in orthodox medical literature. What may be significant to the sequel of the abortive visit of B. J., was the 1954 meeting between representatives of the European Chiropractic Union (then largely B. J. critics) and the Medical Work and Research Group for Chiropractic, held in Brussels. The inability of the physician group to give assurance of official D. C. status in Germany resulted in a stalemate, but it was further evidence of the strides which chiropractic in Europe had made in contrast to its continuing combative state in the "mother country."¹⁴

B.J.'s house organ, *The Fountain Head News*, expressed his continued concern five years later that there was a "Medical Threat to Chiropractic" in Germany. Reproduced were pictures of German physicians using the neurocolometer and also administering an upper cervical adjustment. "We told you so!" declared B. J. adding that "German medical men were absorbing chiropractic and NCA (National Chiropractic Association) American TORS are absorbing MEDICINE."¹⁵

Of course, the years since have demonstrated only that somewhere between the extremes, the truth has surfaced. German medicine did not absorb chiropractic, though its status today may be the most ambiguous in Europe. Perhaps the dedication which we made to Professor Zukschwerdt in *Medicine and Chiropractic* is the best final word that we might offer on the "German Issue:"

"In greatful appreciation of (their) efforts to advance the scientific understanding of chiropractic and to break down the barriers separating chiropractic and medicine."

⁹Ibid

¹⁰Palmer, *Germ. Issue*

¹¹Ibid

¹²Palmer, *Germ. Issue*

¹³Weiant, C. W. and S. Goldschmidt, *Medicine and Chiropractic*, (Gluckstadt, Germany, J. J. Augustin, 1959)

¹⁴Ibid, pp. 91 and 105

¹⁵"Medical Threat to Chiropractic", *Fountain Head News*, 22:3, July 15, 1959